

Frances Burney and Mary Wollstonecraft: Biblical Answers to the 18th Century Gender Crisis

Research Thesis

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I. Introduction

With the rise of sentimentality in the late eighteenth century, perceptions of acceptable gender roles shifted dramatically. Key to the sentimental movement was redefining formerly feminine gender roles as masculine. As the sentimental movement progressed, it became increasingly acceptable for men to exhibit fear and weakness, indulge their whims, and cry effusive tears, all emotions and activities formerly viewed as acceptable only for women.¹ Though many feminist scholars read British women writers of the eighteenth century as undermining rather than enforcing traditional gender roles, I see these writers arguing for a reexamination, not a dismissal, of the traditional roles between men and women.

The purpose of this study is to explore female writers' reactions to the sentimental tradition and analyze their definitions of gender norms in the final decades of the eighteenth century. My reading of Frances Burney's and Mary Wollstonecraft's works explores their reactions to sentimentality and focuses on ideas regarding a restoration of traditional manhood. While most literary criticism of these texts has resulted in a secular reading, there is no denying the influence of the Bible and Christian thought on English writers of the eighteenth century. A few scholars, such as Ana M. Acosta in her *Reading Genesis in the Long Eighteenth Century*,² have recognized and begun to fill this void. However, by focusing her attentions solely on John Milton, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Mary Shelley, Acosta misses much of the "long eighteenth century" and bases her arguments on writers who have already been the subject of much research. Even with the abundance of ultimately secular readings on Mary Wollstonecraft's feminism, Barbara Taylor, William Richey, and Patricia Howell Michaelson published discussions of *The Vindication's* relation to Genesis and Christianity several years

1 See Johnson, Claudia L. *Equivocal Begins: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Print. p. 5.

2 Acosta, Ana M. *Reading Genesis in the Long Eighteenth Century: From Milton to Mary Shelley*. Cornwall: MPG Books, 2006. Print.

before the publication of Acosta's book. In addition, such scholarship ignores Frances Burney.³ This paper provides an alternative to existing scholarship on eighteenth century literature and engages with ongoing issues surrounding definition of gender roles. My research is not limited to the connection between Frances Burney, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Genesis, as Acosta limits her reading, but brings in other Old Testament texts as well as New Testament writings on gender.

When it became socially acceptable for men to indulge their emotions and they were permitted, even encouraged, to abandon their traditional roles of protectors and providers, the resulting gender crisis harmed society as a whole and victimized women. To counteract this trend in male sentimentality, Burney and Wollstonecraft based their arguments for a return to traditional masculinity and femininity on Biblical models of gender. In her 1792 publication, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft relies heavily on the Bible to support her arguments for a more balanced relationships between men and women. Similarly, Frances Burney's novels *Evelina* (1778) and *Camilla* (1796) employ Biblical language and clergymen characters in guardian roles to examine the gender situation.

In the following pages, I will touch on the importance of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in shaping the sentimental tradition. Mary Wollstonecraft claimed Burkean sentimentality gave men license to victimize women. Sentimentality claimed women were inherently inferior to men both mentally and physically, but Wollstonecraft argues God created the two sexes equal on a moral and spiritual level. Though published fourteen years before *Vindication*, Frances Burney's *Evelina* deals with many of the same issues. In this novel, Burney does not make as much use of the Bible as Wollstonecraft, but satirizes unmanly clergy and their subversion of Biblical gender roles while making use of Biblical language to describe *Evelina* and Lord Orville's romance. Four years following the publication of Wollstonecraft's

3 A search on JSTOR for articles with titles connecting Frances Burney with the Bible, Christianity, or religion yields no results.

Vindication, Frances Burney picked up where Wollstonecraft left off in criticizing sentimentality. The protectors and guardians in *Camilla* are absent or incompetent and the hero's sentimentality demands suffering from Camilla before he will believe she truly loves him. Camilla's father, a clergyman, admits the truth of the Biblical argument Wollstonecraft used to say men and women are equal, but abandons these principles in his counsel to Camilla. The consequences of this abandonment reveal that replacing Biblical models of gender with sentimentalized versions of masculinity and femininity harm both men and women.

II. Wollstonecraft's Admonition to Rational Men

Mary Wollstonecraft's reaction to shifting gender roles in the late eighteenth century was largely connected to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). This publication argued that the horrors of the French revolution could have been prevented by fostering a society of sentimentality and chivalry. Burke wrote that the Assembly in France “perverted in themselves, and in those that attend to them, all the well-placed sympathies of the human breast” and “inverted order in all things.”⁴ Yet instead of calling for a revival of traditional masculinity, Burke argued for a softening and feminization of aggressive men. Burke's belief and the ensuing social change was “a crisis of gender” that prompted Mary Wollstonecraft and Frances Burney to write in response to this sentimental movement.⁵

Burke argued for a return to the conventions of chivalry as the answer to the gender crisis which lead to a society where Marie Antoinette could be assaulted in her bedchamber.⁶

Burke paints a vivid picture as a “band of cruel ruffians and assassins ... rushed in the chamber of

4 Burke, Edmund. *Burke's reflections on the Revolution in France, &c. &c. in a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris*. London: printed for J. Parsons, No. 21, Paternoster Row, 1793. *ECCO*. Web. 19 December 2011. pp. 55, 56

5 I am indebted to Claudia Johnson for this description, as well as her observations on Burke's role in shaping the sentimental movement.

6 See Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* pp. 2-3 for Johnson's discussion of Marie-Antoinette's representation in Burke.

the queen and pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked ... to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband, not secure of his own life for a moment” (*RRF* 57). For Burke, chivalry protected women by elevating them to a pedestal of veneration. His presentation of Marie-Antoinette's suffering progressed to a lament that “I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honor and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone” (*RRF* 61). For Burke, chivalry meant “men should feel like women,” yet under the tenets of chivalry such emotion was considered manly because it stripped men of their power to hurt women.⁷ However, Burke's sentimentality found “distressed, wronged, insane, dying, or dead women” the most interesting focus for men's effusive sentiment.⁸ The very ideology that purported to protect women fed off their suffering, just as Burke's argument for chivalry fed off the outrageous spectacle of Marie-Antoinette being pursued to the feet of her powerless husband.

Mary Wollstonecraft approached the French Revolution in an entirely different way. Burke insisted on fostering emotion in men until they were able to properly venerate women, such as he had seen Marie-Antoinette venerated sixteen or seventeen years prior to the Revolution (*RRF* 61). In stark contrast, Wollstonecraft suggests the courtiers in France, prior to and during the Revolution, “were not men” at all because they sacrificed virtues to “fatal passions”.⁹ For Wollstonecraft, the gender issue in this case was that men felt free to victimize women because it was socially acceptable for them to give in to their passions. As Claudia Johnson points out, Mary Wollstonecraft “represents the Burkean man of feeling” as unfit to hold

7 Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* p. 34.

8 Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* p. 5

9 Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women and The Wrongs of Women, or Maria*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2007. Print. p. 82

positions of authority, “confused,” and enslaved by his emotions. She “saw little hope for social change so long as men like Burke unsexed themselves” through effeminate sentimentality.¹⁰

Wollstonecraft does not agree with Burke that men will be more admirable in giving into their passions. Rather, she argues that men should endeavor to be more manly and strive to create a society that protects and respects women by admitting their claim to rationality. Johnson describes Wollstonecraft's solution to the gender crisis as invoking “an older standard of rational masculinity.”¹⁰ For this standard, Wollstonecraft turned to the Bible as a basis for her arguments. In this respect, my reading departs from Johnson's work. We agree in regards to Mary Wollstonecraft's emphasis on a traditional standard of masculinity, but Johnson does not share my treatment of this “traditional standard” as a hearkening back to Biblical models of gender.

Early in her argument against gender roles that victimize women, Wollstonecraft says, “I presume that *rational* men will excuse me for endeavoring to persuade them to become more masculine and respectable”(VRW 27). Sentimental masculinity is hardly masculinity at all, and for men to become “masculine and respectable” a change in society's definitions of gender roles was needed. Wollstonecraft argued for a return to a traditional masculinity coupled with an equality between men and women not found in sentimentality or even the classical tradition. The obvious place for Wollstonecraft to turn while looking for such a balanced model in gender roles was the Judeo-Christian model. Even so, she does not simply adopt the commonly held interpretation of Biblical gender roles, but offers her own interpretation of Biblical gender roles as a preferable alternative to Burkean sentimentality.

Judeo-Christian models for gender roles begin with the Genesis account of creation. Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs to be “an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18).¹¹ In modern

¹⁰ Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* p. 7-8

¹¹ All Biblical references are from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible, originally published in 1611.

English, the Hebrew words quoted here would better translate as “complementary helper.”¹² Men and women were created to fill different, but complimentary roles. For men, those roles included husband, leader, father, and protector. For women, the roles of wife, mother, and helper were preferred. Submission of daughters to fathers and wives to husbands is found throughout Biblical accounts of righteous people, but the rights of women are consistently respected as well. A particularly good example of this is way that the patriarch Abraham went about arranging a marriage for his son. Abraham sent his servant to find a suitable wife for his son Isaac in the 24th chapter of Genesis, and it is Rebekah's male relatives who are responsible for agreeing to the marriage. However, her opinion is sought, and listened to, as well (Gen. 24:58). The marriage would not have taken place without Rebekah's consent. After a long journey on camels, Rebekah, her attending lady, and Abraham's servant approach the dwelling of her future husband. Before Rebekah meets Isaac of the first time, “she took a vail, and covered herself” (Gen. 24:65). Matthew Henry's commentary on this verse points out that the Rebekah veiling herself was “in token of humility, modesty, and subjection.”¹³ Though Rebekah had veto power in the marriage, she still comports herself in a modest, feminine manner that appears to do her honor rather than turn her into a doormat.

Moving on to the New Testament, the Apostle Paul states, “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man ... For Adam was first formed, then Eve” (1 Tim. 2:12-13). This statement is echoed throughout New Testament writings, but with a caveat rarely found in eighteenth century analysis of the Bible. Paul's statements here and in 1 Corinthians 11:3 “that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” may at first seem like a strict hierarchy with women at the lowest run on the social ladder.

12 Baker, Warren and Eugene Carpenter. *The Complete WordStudy Dictionary: Old Testament*. Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003. Print. p. 822

13 Henry, Mathew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Originally published in 1706.

However, Paul goes on to explain, “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman” (1 Cor. 11:11-12). There is a delicate balance in the gender roles ascribed to men and women in the Bible. Male and female were both created in God's image to portray distinct aspects of God's character (Gen. 1:27). The two sexes were intended to work together and complement each other as each fulfilled differing, but equally important, roles.

As Wollstonecraft argues, Biblical models of gender provided a clearly defined role for women, protected women from exploitation by men, and treated women as men's equals morally and spiritually. Wollstonecraft refers to a contemporary interpretation of Genesis when she states, “Probably the prevailing opinion, that woman was created for man, may have taken its rise from Moses's poetical story ... [and] she ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because the whole creation was only created for his convenience or pleasure” (*VRW* 44). In ridiculing this idea, Wollstonecraft is careful not to criticize the Bible itself but only the way it has been interpreted. In her mind, “God has made all things right” but men's interpretation of God's work had been marred by their inventive selfishness (*VRW* 47).

One of the writers whom she quotes most often and attacks most viciously is John Milton. Milton's *Paradise Lost* was such a popular text that in the eighteenth century it had superseded the first chapters of Genesis in poetic and theological importance.¹⁴ Recognizing this, Wollstonecraft featured Milton prominently in her arguments. She points to Milton's re-telling of the creation story as one of the “plausible epithets which men use to soften their insults” towards women by referring to them as “This fair defect / Of nature”¹⁵ and seeks to refute Milton's “rewriting of Genesis” as “irreligious.”¹⁶ Milton's interpretation of the creation story had an

14 Acosta, *Reading Genesis* p. 133.

15 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* p. 53, quoting Milton, *Paradise Lost* 10.891-91

16 Acosta, *Reading Genesis* p. 129.

enormous influence on subsequent readings of Genesis, and before Wollstonecraft could put forth her own views on the creation and fall of man and woman, she had to address Milton's take on the Genesis account and remove it from competition with her own views. In her argument, Wollstonecraft represents Milton's portrayal of Eve as “sensual wish-fulfillment.”¹⁷ Eve's complete dependence on Adam and her statement that, “God is thy law, thou mine: to know no more / Is women's happiest knowledge and her praise” is represented by Wollstonecraft as the kind of “arguments used to children” who are not old enough to think for themselves.¹⁸ By presenting Eve in this fashion, Milton supported an ideology that claimed women existed to gratify the desires of men. This idea is at the heart of the sentimental tradition Wollstonecraft criticized in Burke's writings.

In his recent article, William Richey argued that Wollstonecraft attacks the Genesis account of creation as well as Milton's interpretation, by reworking the “ancient narrative” of the fall.¹⁹ He argues that Wollstonecraft must “confront Genesis and counter its attribution of all earthy evils to Eve's pursuit of knowledge.”²⁰ Richey conveniently neglects to point out that it is Milton who describes the tree Eve eats from as “the tree of knowledge.” Genesis is more specific, referring to “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9, 17). Eve's sin was not her desire to learn, but her giving in to the temptation to “be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). While Wollstonecraft does “doubt whether woman was created for man” (*VRW* 79), as stated in 1 Corinthians 11:9, she is not attempting a wholesale overthrow of Genesis.²¹ Rather, by contradicting Milton's claims regarding Eve, Wollstonecraft opens the door for her own arguments about reinterpreting gender on the basis of the Bible.

17 Acosta, *Reading Genesis* p. 135.

18 Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* p. 37, quoting Milton, *Paradise Lost* 4.637-38

19 Richey, William. “A More Godlike Portion: Mary Wollstonecraft's Feminist Rereadings of the Fall.” *English Language Notes* (1994): 28-38. Print. p. 28.

20 Richey, p. 29

21 See Acosta, *Reading Genesis*. p. 129 for a discussion of Wollstonecraft shying “away from an unambiguous rewriting of Genesis,” the same kind of rewriting she criticized in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft upsets sentimentality's claim that women are inherently weak, and should remain so, by arguing that God created men and women equal on a moral and spiritual level. She credits God for impressing these ideas on her soul and giving her "sufficient strength of mind to dare to exert my own reason, till, becoming dependent only on him for the support of my virtue, I view with indignation, the mistaken notions that enslave my sex" (*VRW* 55). Considering the volume of scripture Wollstonecraft relies on to support her argument, this does not seem to be an affectation she used as a nod to Christianity. Modern critic Patricia Howelle Michaelson notes that, "although in our secular age, historians of feminism treat Wollstonecraft's argument as if it were secular, in fact her feminism was very much an expression of religious belief."²² *Vindication* is an argument for equal education of women based on the religious argument that "reason leads to virtue – and virtue is critical solely and explicitly because we expect and afterlife."²³ Several years before writing *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft expressed in a letter that "intellectual and moral improvement" were "so connected – I cannot even in thought separate them."²⁴ In *Vindication*, she applies this already formed idea to both women and men by insisting they have an equal right to and aptitude for improving themselves both intellectually and morally.

Additional evidence that Wollstonecraft saw the Bible as the proper basis for models of gender comes from the fact that she does not attempt to undermine traditional understandings of family. "I do not wish women to have power over men," she says at one point in *Vindication*, "but over themselves" (*VRW* 85). One purpose Wollstonecraft mentions for writing the *Vindication* is the hope that equality between men and women will stabilize families and that

22 Michaelson, Patricia Howelle. "Religious Bases of Eighteenth-Century Feminism: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Quakers." *Women's Studies* 22 (1993): 281-295. Print. p.282

23 Michaelson p. 287, 288

24 Michaelson describes this letter as anticipating "the religious argument of the *Vindication*, though without specific reference to women." p. 288, 289

“marriage may become more sacred” (*VRW* 18). As Michaelson points out, “*The Rights of Woman* is not, in fact, about rights at all; it is, rather, about how women could be better fit to fulfill their duties – especially their maternal duties.”²⁵ Wollstonecraft wrote that she wished “women would cherish an affection for their husbands, founded on the same principle that devotion” to the Almighty rests upon (*VRW* 66). That marriage is a sacred union which mirrors the relationship between God and the Church is an idea inseparably connected to Judeo-Christian ideals regarding gender. It is equally impossible to separate Wollstonecraft's arguments regarding marriage, family, and gender from her alliance to Biblical models for relationships. Instead of dismissing religious arguments regarding gender, Wollstonecraft calls attention to often overlooked aspects of Biblical gender roles in order to bolster her own arguments.

III. *Evelina*, or a portrait of the perfect hero

Frances Burney's concern with changing definitions of gender predates both Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*. She published her first novel, *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, in 1778, but this epistolary fiction shares elements with Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 political treatise. Both writers deal with femininity in the light of contemporary masculinity and both use the Bible and/or Biblical language to support their arguments. Burney's use of Biblical gender roles is more subtle than Wollstonecraft's bold declarations in *Vindication*. Wollstonecraft was able to directly interact with contemporary reading of Genesis, whereas Burney's fictional style necessitated her critiquing departures from Judeo-Christian gender roles through the characters she created. In *Evelina*, the Bible is never mentioned or quoted from directly, and Burney's connection with Biblical gender roles is less clear in this novel than in her later writings. However, Burney

²⁵ Michaelson p. 287

makes use of Biblical diction which connects the romance in *Evelina* to the Song of Solomon. Additionally, her decision to cast a failed figure of male guardianship as a clergy man prefigures her more obvious criticism of unmanly clergy in *Camilla* and suggests that some of the failures she critiques in men are owing to the subversion of Biblical models of gender.

In *Evelina*, the heroine is a seventeen-year-old orphan under the guardianship of the Reverend Arthur Villars. *Evelina* is more of a straightforward love story than Burney's later novels, which feature lengthy, convoluted plots and use negative examples of manhood, even in the heroes, to call attention to societal problems.²⁶ *Evelina* reads like a proto Jane Austen romance, but it contains decidedly Burney-esque situations of peril and violence towards the heroine, largely brought about by the actions of the men surrounding *Evelina*. A core reason for this persecution of the heroine is Mr. Villars' failures of guardianship. Julia Epstein described Villars as a “dangerously ineffectual and naively judgmental elderly country parson.”²⁷ He is unable to protect *Evelina* from the dangers of society or the machinations of her grandmother, Madame Duval, and the advice he offers in his letters to *Evelina* is of limited use.

In *Evelina*, and later in *Camilla*, Burney employed misguided clergymen to present a picture of what contemporary masculinity was not and by extension what it should have been. *Evelina* is not the first ward of Mr. Villars to fall victim to barbarous men and the conniving Madame Duval. *Evelina*'s grandfather, Mr. Evelyn, entrusted Mr. Villars with “the sole guardianship of his daughter's person till her eighteenth year.”²⁸ After that date passed, Miss Evelyn's remarried mother, now Madam Duval, summoned her daughter to Paris and forced her into a private marriage with Sir John Belmont. Mr. Villars blames himself for Miss Evelyn's

26 One of the claims Margaret Doody puts forth in her biographical examination of Frances Burney's writings is that *Cecilia* and *Camilla* deserve at least as much attention as *Evelina*, largely owing to Burney's treatment of unconventional heroes.

27 Epstein, Julia. *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing*. Bristol: Bristol Classic Press, 1989. Print. p. 101.

28 Burney, Francis. *Evelina*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print. p. 16

subsequent disgrace, saying he should have “protected and supported” her while she was with relatives he knew to be inappropriate guardians (*E* 16). After Belmont discovered Miss Evelyn did not bring a fortune to their marriage, he burned the marriage certificate and refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of his child (*E* 17). This child, Evelina, was left to the guardianship of Mr. Villars after Lady Belmont, née Miss Evelyn, died in childbirth. Legally, she is “heiress to two large fortunes” belonging to her father and grandfather, but as long as she is unacknowledged by Belmont she stands to inherit neither (*E* 20). As Mr. Villars fears, but does little to prevent, Evelina has “too much beauty to escape notice, has too much sensibility to be indifferent to it; but she has too little wealth to be sought with propriety by men of the fashionable world” (*E* 20). Even though he admits these concerns, Mr. Villars commits Evelina to the care of Mrs. Mirvan for a trip to London early in the novel. In doing so, he knowingly places Evelina in a position where she can be exploited.

Once in London, Evelina attracts the attention of Lord Orville, the novel’s hero, and Sir Clement Willoughby, whom Evelina dubs her “persecutor” (*E* 49). One of the reasons Sir Clement feels he can torment Evelina is the obscurity of her origins. Mr. Villars has supplied her with the fictional name Anville but, as Lady Howard points out, his concealment of Evelina’s “birth, name, and pretensions” minimizes her chances of making a respectable marriage (*E* 125). Villars wants to claim the title of father, but is unable to provide her with legitimacy.²⁹ Her mother’s family is equally ill equipped to offer Evelina the protection of legitimate family ties. Through a series of unfortunate and often humiliating incidents during the London trip with the Mirvans, Evelina falls under the dubious guardianship of her grandmother. Though he knows Evelina is not safe in the hands of Madame Duval, Mr. Villars can only offer hollow assurances of his protection and lament that Evelina, his “sole source ... of all earthly felicity,” is absent

²⁹ See Epstein, *The Iron Pen* p. 104 for an expanded discussion of Mr. Villars relationship to Evelina as a type of father.

from him (*E* 307). As the novel progresses, Evelina is repeatedly accosted in public places by uncouth men and nearly kidnapped, yet Madame Duval does not seem to think Evelina needs her protection and Mr. Villars is incapable of aiding his ward. Throughout all this, Mr. Villars persists in a refusal to participate in convincing Sir John Belmont to acknowledge Evelina and grant her the protection of a respectable, legitimate name.

One of many incidents where Evelina is placed in danger occurs while Evelina is visiting Marybone-gardens with Madame Duval and her relatives. Evelina is separated from the protection of her party and, as she relates in a letter to Mr. Villars, the moment as she was visibly without a guardian she was frequently approached “by some bold and unfeeling man, to whom my distress, which, I think, must be very apparent, only furnished a pretense for impertinent witticisms, or free gallantry” (*E* 234). She finally escapes back to her grandmother, who does not even comment on Evelina's distress. Lord Orville is the only character who appears “*greatly* concerned” for Evelina throughout this affair; even Mr. Villars' reply mentions only that her account gave him “no little uneasiness” (*E* 236, 254). By presenting Mr. Villars as an ineffective guardian, Burney comments on the extent to which the clergy had strayed from Biblical ideals of manhood. The sundry difficulties and dangers Evelina falls into firmly associate Mr. Villars and his hollow profession of protection with the failed guardians and clergy Burney would examine more completely in *Camilla*.

Though published twelve years prior to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution*, *Evelina* deals with many of the same gender issues that Mary Wollstonecraft addressed the *Vindication* as having been brought to the forefront of society by Burke's argument in favor of sentimentality. One of Burney's concerns manifests itself in the extreme victimization of women in *Evelina*. Evelina is provoked by a man named Lovel, hounded and kidnapped by Sir Clement, publicly attacked, affronted by a staring Lord, and rudely accosted by strange men at Vauxhall. In fact,

there are few places Evelina can go “without being forced, intruded upon, seized, kidnapped, or in some other way violated.”³⁰ Judith Newton describes this persecution as a “woman's fate” once she entered into the marriage market in the 1700s, and points out that Burney “is one of the few writers in the century to take the discomfort of it seriously.”³¹

The commentary Burney develops regarding the behavior of Sir Clement Willoughby anticipates the arguments Burke would use in favor of courtly, chivalric society. Though Sir Clement's conduct is described as “strange, provoking, and ridiculous,” Evelina manifests a tolerance for him that appears to be connected with a fiction he creates of himself as a chivalric man (*E* 49-50). Evelina, at first repulsed by his behavior, eventually values his opinion so much that she is ashamed for him to see her in the company of her uncouth relations (*E* 95). When Sir Clement kidnaps Evelina, she is at first terrified by his declaration, “I adore you” and “my life is at your devotion” (*E* 99, 100). But after Evelina convinced Sir Clement of her genuine fear, he “flung himself on his knees, and pleaded with so much submission” that she described herself as “really obliged to forgive him, because his humiliation made me quite ashamed” (*E* 101). The “courtly fiction” that Evelina is a “fascinating treasure, the beautiful but distant object” is what distinguishes Sir Clement's pursuit of Evelina from the pursuits of more uncouth men.³² This also makes him more dangerous, because it masks his predatory nature under a chivalric declaration of adoration and devotion as Evelina's slave that Burke would later advocate as the solution to society's ills.

In contrast to Mr. Villars' failures as a guardian and the fearsome chivalry of Sir Clement Willoughby, Lord Orville represents a masculine ideal. He is more of a traditional heroic figure than the men in Burney's later novels, and frequently takes on the role of Evelina's protector. As

30 Newton, Judith. “Evelina: Or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the Marriage Market.” *Modern Language Studies* 6.1 (1976): 48-56. *JSTOR*. 17 November 2011. Web. p. 50

31 Newton, “Evelina.” p. 50

32 Newton, “Evelina.” p. 51.

his concern for Evelina when he sees her lost in Marybone gardens reveals, Lord Orville is the only character in the entire story who takes an active, rather than passive, interest in Evelina's welfare. On the night Sir Clement tries to abduct Evelina, Lord Orville offers her the use of his carriage and, when Sir Clement hustles her off instead, Lord Orville goes straight to Evelina's family. He not only acquaints them with her situation, but declares "he had found it impossible to return home, before he enquired after" Evelina's safety (*E* 101). As Lord Orville's romantic interest in Evelina deepens, his role as a protector moves more and more to the forefront of their relationship and he "acquires a whole series of titles" – friend, brother, lover and finally husband – to "justify him in this role."³³ The title "brother," which seems out of place in this list because that relationship is meant to exclude the titles "lover" and "husband," represents one of Burney's usages of Biblical language. This scene is often read by modern critics as moderately incestuous,³⁴ but Burney's choice of words in one of the most touching scenes in *Evelina* hints that Burney intended a far different reading.

After recovering from an illness, Evelina journeys with her widowed neighbor, Mrs. Selwyn, to Clifton Heights. There, she is unfortunate enough to attract the attention of Lord Merton, who is engaged to marry Lord Orville's sister, Lady Louisa. Lord Merton's improprieties culminate in a scene where he becomes drunk enough to pay Evelina inappropriate attention with his fiancée as a witness. Lady Louisa is able to appeal to her brother for refuge in this case, and Evelina, "frightened to see how much Lord Merton was in liquor" cried, "Would to Heaven ... that I, too, had a brother!--- and then I should not be exposed to such treatment!" (*E* 313). The moment he has a proper excuse for claiming the rights of a protector, Lord Orville leaves his sister and asks, "Will Miss Anville allow *me* the honour of taking that title?" as he rescues her

33 Newton, "Evelina." p. 52.

34 Fizer, Irene. "The Name of the Daughter: Identity and Incest in *Evelina*." *Refiguring the Father: New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy*. Ed. Patricia Yaeger and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989. 78-107. Print.

from Lord Merton (*E* 313). Though this piques Lord Orville's sister, Evelina is extremely thankful, telling him, "it is from you alone I meet with any respect" (*E* 314). Moved by this honesty, Lord Orville again entreats Evelina, "allow *me* to be your friend; think of me as if I were indeed your brother" (*E* 314). The brotherliness with which Lord Orville describes his interest in Evelina is indicative of a deeply concerned friendship. Just as brotherly love in the language of the New Testament is not restricted to blood relations,³⁵ there is no indication in the text that Evelina, Lord Orville, or any of the other characters find a contradiction between Lord Orville's adoption of a brotherly role in his friendship towards Evelina and his romantic interest in her.

Burney's use of Biblical language is not confined to the similarities between Lord Orville's brotherly concern for Evelina and the brotherly love of the New Testament. Her juxtaposition of the roles brother, protector, and lover also evokes the Biblical language of the Song of Songs. This book of Hebrew poetry has been variously interpreted as an allegory of God's love for Israel, "a drama about Solomon and his bride," a poem making use of Solomon's name but really concerned with "a pair of rustic lovers," or "a sequence of nuptial songs celebrating the week of wedding festivities."³⁶ Whatever the original intent of the song described in the King James Version of the Bible as Solomon's, its poetic celebration of love between a man and a woman uniquely connects it with a discussion of Burney's use of the Bible. The Song of Songs is concerned with two principle speakers celebrating their "lawful love to be sanctioned by marriage."³⁷ The two speakers are not related by blood,³⁸ which would be an unlawful union

35 The Greek words φιλάδελφος and φιλαδελφία, both translated as "brotherly love" or "love as brethren" have a broad sense that includes love of Christians for one another and love of close friends. Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete WordStudy Dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993. Print. p. 1443-44

36 Freehof, Solomon B. "The Song of Songs: A General Suggestion." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 39.4 (1949): 397-402. *JSTOR*. 12 December 2011. Web. p. 397, 398

37 Segal, M. H. "The Song of Songs." *Vetus Testamentum* 12.4 (1962): 470-490. *JSTOR*. 12 December 2011. Web.

38 The female speaker's wish in chapter 8, verse 1, that her lover were "as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother!" makes it clear that they are not, in fact, related. Even Francis Landy, who favors an incestuous reading for the Song, admits "The Beloved is only metaphorically a sister." Landy, Francis. "The Song of Songs and the

by Hebraic law,³⁹ yet the male speaker repeatedly describes his beloved as “my sister, my spouse” and once as “my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled.”⁴⁰ Describing the relationship in this way is not meant to cast a defiling, incestuous light on the Song or the relationship between the two poetic speakers any more than Burney intends Lord Orville describing himself as Evelina's brother to tarnish their eventual marriage.

As Russell Martineau points out in his reading of the Song of Songs, claiming a fictional, brother-like relationship makes public affection more socially acceptable. Martineau explains the female speaker's wish that he were her brother as an excuse to “kiss him without impropriety; which she must not now, as they are only lovers.”⁴¹ M. H. Segal's explanation is almost identical, saying the “damsel” wishes “he was her brother that she might show him love in public.”⁴² Lord Orville taking the title of brother functions in much the same way, allowing him to protect Evelina in public.

Following the scene where Lord Orville intervenes on Evelina's behalf as a brother to defend her from Lord Meron, Lord Orville confronts Sir Clement regarding his intentions towards Evelina. Sir Clement's offense at Lord Orville's questions centers on the grounds that such an interest in Evelina's welfare belongs only to “a father,” “a brother,” “or a lover” (*E* 345). Not yet wanting to set himself up as a rival for Evelina's affections, Lord Orville speaks as a concerned brother, warning Sir Clement, “This young lady, though she seems alone, and, in some measure, unprotected, is not entirely without friends” and that Evelina is not “a proper object to trifle with” (*E* 346). With Mr. Villars incapable of acting in Evelina's interest, Lord Orville

Garden of Eden.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98.4 (1979): 513-528. *JSTOR*. 13 December 2011. Web. p. 527

39 Leviticus 20:17: “And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness; it *is* a wicked thing; and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people: he hath uncovered his sister's nakedness; he shall bear his iniquity.”

40 Song of Solomon 4:9, 10, 12; 5:1, 2

41 Martineau, Russell. “The Song of Songs.” *The American Journal of Philology* 13.3 (1892): 307-328. *JSTOR*. 12 December 2011. Web. p.311

42 Segal, “The Song of Songs.” p. 476.

recognized Evelina's need for a protector and took upon himself the title allowing him to protect her most effectively. Burney's use of Biblical language in having Lord Orville claim Evelina first as his metaphorical sister and finally as his literal spouse is one of Burney's clearest uses of Biblical relationship models in *Evelina*.

In her debut novel, Burney presents Lord Orville as a perfect hero to argue in favor of gender roles based in Judeo-Christian tradition. Julia Newton argues that Lord Orville is “too good to be true,” but her only support for this argument is that marriage, to Lord Orville or to anyone else, “means dependence, and in Evelina's case marriage means abdication as well. ... Evelina's destiny is to *be* protected, to marry, and her preparation for that future is to abdicate rather than to maintain power.”⁴³ I suspect Burney, and Mary Wollstonecraft as well, would have argued Newton's claim. It is not Evelina's destiny, but her *desire* to be protected by a man she can truly respect. She does not want the protection Sir Clement offers and is only briefly attracted by his hollow professions of courtly love. Instead, Evelina, and by extension Burney as her creator, favors marriage to a respectable protector, just as Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* argued that marriage was essential to the proper working of society. Proponents of sentimentality may not have admitted the existence of a middle ground between emotionless detachment and excess of feeling, but Burney makes a case for men who possess the ability to have feelings without being incapacitated by them. In doing this, her earliest novel creates an idealized lover-hero, while her subsequent novels examine the failures of men who are incapacitated, or even become antagonists for the heroine, due to their excess of feeling.

IV. Figures of Male Authority in *Camilla*

By the 1796 publication of *Camilla*, the sentimental movement was well established

⁴³ Newton, “Evelina.” p. 53

and open to Burney's intensive criticism.⁴⁴ In spite of the fact that Burke maintained chivalric, sentimental manhood was concerned with protecting women, extreme victimization of women still occurred as a result of male sentimentality. Eighteen years prior to the publication of *Camilla*, in *Evelina*, Burney crafted a heroine who was persecuted by anonymous men and would be lovers, largely as a result of her guardian's incompetence, but who finds a protector in the heroic Lord Orville. Four years after Wollstonecraft published *The Vindication*,⁴⁵ Burney's satiric criticism of upset gender roles moves the victimization of her heroine in *Camilla* even closer to home. Camilla is victimized not only by society and strangers, but also by the incompetence of her own father and uncle and by Edgar Mandlebert, the man she eventually marries.

In *Camilla*, the men who should be filling protector and guardian roles are consistently absent or grossly incompetent. The earliest evidence of a failure of manhood and guardianship is seen in Sir Hugh Tyrold's gross mistreatment of his niece, Camilla's sister Eugenia. Though his extreme negligence he exposes Eugenia to small-pox and cripples her physically in the accident involving a balancing plank in the park.⁴⁶ After all this, his only reaction is a public display of excess emotion. His first action is to "burst into a passionate flood of tears" (C 28). When the news of Eugenia seems good, Sir Hugh "commanded that the whole house be illuminated" and orders that gifts be distributed to the entire village (C 29.). When it becomes clear Eugenia will be crippled and scared for the remainder of her life, Sir Hugh commands everyone in the house to attend him in the chapel to witness his desire to bequeath his entire estate upon Eugenia, in case he should die of "an apoplexy before his new will could be

44 Claudia Johnson states Burney's later novels were written "at the end of a sentimental tradition which had been strategically deployed in order to redefine masculinity and re-form political subjects." *Equivocal Beings*, p. 142.

45 Johnson argues that Burney's "uneasiness about the masculinization of Sentiment" prompted her to start where Wollstonecraft "left off" in critiquing sentimentality. *Equivocal Beings*, p. 145.

46 Burney, Frances. *Camilla*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print. p. 23, 27, 28

written” (C 30). Throughout the incident, Sir Hugh's remorse is expressed in the most public and excessive way possible, in keeping with the tenets of sentimentality but of little use to Eugenia.

Eugenia's victimization at the hands of male nurturance is a disaster brought on by male usurpation of the maternal role, a role which traditionally and Biblically belonged to women. As Doody points out, *Camilla* was written while Burney herself was experiencing the joys and “power” of motherhood, and the disastrous consequences resulting if men of sensibility take over the maternal role were likely of increased importance to her.⁴⁷ Male sentimentality threatened femininity by throwing “female feeling ... into doubt” and appropriating feminine gender roles.⁴⁸ As men became more and more like the traditional definition of women, a crisis of authority developed.⁴⁹ It was not considered socially acceptable for women to retain the feminine attributes usurped by men, but they were mocked as too manly if they took on the roles men had abdicated. In the sentimental tradition, feminine gender roles were recoded as masculine, resulting in men abdicating or botching their roles as guardians and authorities in favor of feminine roles which they were incapable of filling in the same way or with similar success as women.

Camilla and Eugenia's father is of little more value than Sir Hugh as a guardian. He allows Camilla to travel from home twice without recourse to suitable male protection and absents himself from a traditional male role even when he is present in the novel. The one time Mr. Tyrold offers Camilla aid in her troubles, his sermon actually creates more difficulties for her, both as a result of his admonition to struggle “against yourself as you would struggle against an enemy” and by his claim that there is no practicable reason to heed the undeniable truth that

47 Doody, Margaret Anne. *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988. Print. p. 216, 217

48 Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, p. 142.

49 Claudia Johnson describes *Camilla* as “haunted by crisis of authority – paternal, political, and literary” *Equivocal Beings*, p. 143.

men and women are equal (C 358). As a clergyman, Mr. Tyrold draws heavily from contemporary interpretations of the Judeo-Christian tradition in his sermon to Camilla. This sermon is delivered to her in the form of a lengthy letter written once he becomes aware of her apparently unrequited attachment for Edgar.

In this letter, Mr. Tyrold admits there is no doubt of women's equal rights “in nature, in theory, or even in common sense,” but he maintains this truth is “rather curious than important” because there is no “proof of it's practicability. ... Since Man must choose Woman, or Woman Man” it is woman's duty to “retire to be chosen” (C 358). Mr. Tyrold recognizes that, Biblically, “the head of the woman is the man” (1 Cor. 11:3) and that men and women are equal — “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). However, when Mr. Tyrold's culture and Mr. Tyrold's faith clash, he agrees with conduct books and societal views regarding the role of woman rather than Biblical models for gender. His mention of Biblical truths shows that Mr. Tyrold knows that men and women were created equal, as Mary Wollstonecraft argued in *Vindication*, but he blatantly disregards these facts in favor of his society's ideas regarding gender.

The corruption of Mr. Tyrold's understanding of Judeo-Christian gender roles by sentimentality results in an uncomfortable situation for Mrs. Tyrold as well as Camilla. Mr. Tyrold has abandoned the “once classically masculine virtues of severity, firmness, resolution, and fortitude,” which Mrs. Tyrold takes on of necessity.⁵⁰ She is thus described as having “a firmness of mind which nothing could shake,” while Burney describes Mr. Tyrold as “gentle with wisdom, and benign in virtue,” having “mildness that urged him to pity” and exercising a softening influence on his spouse (C 8-9). Without having been told the character being described was male, this passage regarding Mr. Tyrold would almost invariably lead to the

⁵⁰ Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* p. 147

conclusion that this person was a woman. Mrs. Tyrold is thus placed in the difficult situation of submitting to a husband who is incapable of functioning as an authority figure. As a good clergyman's wife, Mrs. Tyrold cannot usurp the authority of her husband, yet because he is a non-functional head she becomes a strict, almost fearful, maternal figure. Her femininity is adversely affected by his sentimentalized masculinity.

Edgar's sentimentality is just as problematic for Camilla as Mr. Tyrold's sentimentality is for Mrs. Tyrold. Julia Epstein notes of *Camilla* that the "heroine's chief tormentor here, ironically, is the hero-lover."⁵¹ Edgar's role as tormentor can ultimately be traced to effusions of emotion and gender confusion mandated by the rise of sentimentality. One of the first descriptions of Edgar tells us that at thirteen years of age he was "an uncommonly spirited and manly boy" (C 17). Following incidents flesh out this description. The thirteen-year-old Edgar acts with astonishing "presence of mind" when Sir Hugh exposes Eugenia to small pox, and when Eugenia is injured in the park Edgar is able, "with admirable adroitness" to preserve "the elder girls from suffering by the accident" (C 24, 27). He then carried Eugenia to the house and "galloped off, unbid, for a surgeon" (C 27). Young Edgar, as yet largely unhampered by expectations of sentimental masculinity, knows his own mind, is "manly," and quite capable of giving helpful advice in a crisis. Yet by the time he is an adult, Edgar has become crippled by self-doubt and sentimentality.

Edgar is excessively proud and torments himself with concealed, yet unbridled, emotion. His sentimentality cripples him so much that he is incapable of forwarding his relationship with Camilla, even though he decided very early in the novel that he wishes to marry her. In cautioning Edgar not to enter into a hasty marriage, Edgar's mentor, Dr. Marchmont, attacks his lack of confidence and suggests that Camilla might love Edgar for his money instead

51 Epstein, *The Iron Pen* p. 125

of himself. By the end of this conversation, Edgar is “filled now with a distrust of himself and of his powers ... struck to the soul with the apprehension of failing to gain her affection, and wounded in every point both of honour and delicacy... [H]is confidence was gone; his elevation of sentiment was depressed; a general mist clouded his prospects, and a suspensive discomfort inquired his mind” (C 161-162). This lack of confidence follows him throughout the novel, only being dispatched by his accidentally coming across a note wherein Camilla confessed her attachment for him at what she believed would be the end of her life. That Edgar cannot bring himself to believe Camilla loves him without her deathbed confession reveals a basic insecurity and distrust of himself directly related to the free-reign he internally gives his emotions. His lack of self-confidence and failure to know his own mind result in Camilla's confusion and contribute to her eventual madness.

Edgar's torment of Camilla involves verbal admonitions⁵² and a concealment of his expectations regarding her conduct that eventually leads to Camilla's separation from Edgar and her parents. Camilla's madness resulting from this separation brings her near death before she is “rewarded” at the end of the novel by marriage to Edgar. Edgar's sentimentalized masculinity demands that Camilla display the marks of a sentimental woman which Mary Wollstonecraft bemoans in her *Vindication*. His expectations place her in an impossible conundrum, conflicting with her father's insistence that she display an inhuman self-control because men are the only ones free to express their sentiment (C 358-59). The strain from these two competing authority figures is what drives Camilla mad, ironically resulting in the one thing Edgar requires to prove her love for him — an artless, death-bed confession of her feelings (C 898). There is a clear flaw in a society where a woman must die, figuratively at least, to prove her love.

⁵² Edgar describes his admonitions to Camilla as “torment.” He asks if she might allow him “now and then, to torment you into a little serious reflection,” p. 267. Later he tells her, “I had purposed tormenting you, from time to time,” p. 354. The final use of the word “torment” in the novel is a promise from Edgar that he will not “again torment” Camilla about an improper acquaintance, Mrs. Mittin, p. 708.

VI. Conclusion

Virtue, both public and private, can only be preserved in a society where reason is cultivated in the minds of both men and women. Wollstonecraft accepted it as fact that women are weaker than men, in so far as physical strength at least, and were created so in accordance with Biblical gender roles (*VRW* 24). She considers this a natural order, which she has no wish to invert, though she maintains there is no reason “their virtues should differ in respect to their nature” (*VRW* 44). Wollstonecraft's admittance of a “natural order” whereby men and women are created to fill differing, but complimentary, roles is not by any means an excuse for men to abuse women. Instead she says the subjugation of women begins when, “not content with this natural pre-eminence, men endeavor to sink us still lower” (*VRW* 24). The victimization of women is manifested in two ways: to subjugate their minds by denying women reason and to subjugate them physically by cherishing and exploiting feminine weakness.

In *Evelina*, Frances Burney anticipated the crisis of gender which would be brought about by Burkean sentimentality. In the character of Mr. Villars she presented a clergyman incapable of offering sound advice to or protecting his ward. With Sir Clement Willoughby, Burney criticized a sentimental man who fancies himself chivalrous as an excuse to torment helpless women. Both serve as negative examples of manhood, as the majority of her male characters do in *Camilla*. In *Evelina*, however, Burney offers Lord Orville as a positive foil for Villars and Willoughby and in his character demonstrates an idealized heroic male figure. By characterizing the relationship between Evelina and Lord Orville in Biblical terms of brotherly love, Burney also associates the masculine ideal she presents with Biblical gender roles and emphasizes the protection legitimate male authority can offer women.

Under the male sentimentality extant in *Camilla*, “genuine female suffering [is]

greeted with ... gleeful, unrelenting cruelty.”⁵³ Sentiment eliminated a desire to save and protect women, as is found in Judeo-Christian traditions, while manifesting a desire to observe women suffer. It is interesting to wonder how different the romance in *Camilla* would have been had Edgar followed the Judeo-Christian admonition for men to “love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25) in a sacrificial nourishing and cherishing of Camilla, “giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel” (1 Pet. 3:7). Instead of a sentimentalized deficiency of reason, this older standard of masculinity could have resulted in a character Wollstonecraft called “truly sublime” — a man who “acts from principle, and governs the inferior springs of activity without slackening their vigour; whose feelings give vital heat to his resolves, but never hurry him into feverish eccentricities.”⁵⁴ Both lack of emotion and uncontrolled emotion in men result in the suffering of women, yet there is — there must be — a balance where male feelings are both governed and used to spark positive action.

Though she is heavily critical of men, Burney does not so much question the legitimacy of male authority as she does point out the inadequacy of sentimental men to fill these roles. In *Evelina* she allows the hero to function as a masculine ideal in contrast to Mr. Villars' inadequacy as a guardian and Sir Clement's perversion of chivalry. In *Camilla*, there are no wholly positive male figures and the dangers of sentimentality's effect on gender roles is at the forefront. Sentimentality supported the victimization of women through making a display of their suffering and by prompting men to abdicate the traditional role of protector they had previously been expected to fill. Burney's criticism of the clergy through Mr. Villars and Mr. Tyrold, as well as her Biblical language to describe an ideal romance, criticizes misuse of the Bible to support exploitation of women and agrees with Wollstonecraft's insistence on a return to traditional, Biblical models of gender for men and women. In a society professing Christianity,

53 Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* p. 152

54 Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* p. 7, quoting Wollstonecraft's 1790 *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*

Wollstonecraft's use of the Bible to support and defend her position on gender roles could not be taken lightly by her readers. Her *Vindication* tears apart arguments, like Milton's, which use the Bible as an excuse to treat women as inferior. Wollstonecraft contends "that the sexual distinction which men have so warmly insisted upon is arbitrary" and that it is men's lack of chastity "and consequent disregard of modesty" which tends "to degrade both sexes" (*VRW* 231). Her heavy-handed criticism of men for oppressing women and women for not fighting their oppression made it clear that she, like Burney, advocated a return to traditional gender roles, with the addition of a proper Biblical perspective.

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